

by GORDAN WARD M.D. in 1925.

“Presently the Post Office decided that it was objectionable to allow any printing to appear on the front of the stamp and after about 1868 all names of firms, etc., appeared on the back, in red, and beneath the gum. These were the work of Perkins, Bacon and 6 different underprints are known, namely, those of the Oxford Union Society; of Copestake, Moore, Crampton & Co.; J. & C. Boyd; W.H. Smith; The Great Eastern Railway; and Smith, Elder & Co. The latter is recorded on the authority of Mr. Walter Morley, who tells me that he has seen a single copy of Plate 87.

The next change was the substitution of black underprints over the gum, and of these about 50 are known. No doubt they were cheaper to produce and thus more popular, but as they come off with the gum, and are presumably stolen, if in the mint state, they are difficult to procure in good condition. These black underprints persisted until the days of the penny lilac with 14 dots, i.e., until 1881. On this issue the underprint of the Fore Street Warehouse Company is known. By this time the system of perforating initials through the stamps had become well established and when, a little later, a well known firm desired to print "Pears' Soap" on the backs of their stamps, the Post Office intervened to prevent their use. These stamps are therefore only known unused.

Messrs. J. Sloper and Co., of London, had the monopoly of perforated stamps with the initials of firms or the devices of bodies corporate but this monopoly no longer holds. Mr. R. W. E. Bunn, Boro' Treasurer of the Corporation of Cambridge, tells me that the Corporation's stamps are perforated with the device of a shield, by Messrs. Waterlow, the present stamp contractors. Amongst such devices the letters B.T., surmounted by a crown, used by the Board of Trade, attracted sufficient attention from collectors to make it worth someone's while to produce forgeries.

Certain stalwarts, however, accepted the veto of the Post Office with great regret and for 15 years Messrs. W. H. Everett & Son, of London, sought permission to revert to underprints. I learn from Messrs. Everett that they first pressed for a non-negotiable stamp

of special design, failing which they wished to print under the gum. If this were not allowed they desired to print over the gum with a rubber roller invented and patented by Mr. Arthur Everett. This they were eventually allowed to do in 1903 and this roller was in use on all values up to one shilling until 1915. In that year, Messrs. Everett say, "practically all our regular staff had gone to the war, and we were more or less at the mercy of casual labour so that we felt that we wanted greater protection than the roller gave us; you will see from the enclosed edging which has had a good impression from the roller, that it is perfectly easy to remove the impression sufficiently to make the stamps good for any ordinary purpose." Messrs. Everett therefore reverted in 1915 to the use of a large perforated letter "E" to prevent the stamp thief defrauding them.

But in the meantime Messrs. Watts, of Manchester had commenced to print the word "WATTSES" on the back of their stamps over the gum, and they still continue the practice. (N.B.1925) This firm had experienced a difficulty which must be very frequent with the thinner stamps of today, namely, that the perforated sheets stuck together and were readily torn. Hence their continued use of the underprint which is done by their printers with "odds and ends of ink that would otherwise be wasted". I have here specimens of the work of Messrs. Everett and Messrs. Watts.

But although overprinting was abolished for private firms and for postal purposes, it has continued on stamps intended to be used fiscally and also, until recently, on the stamps used by Government Departments. These latter are duly recorded in catalogues as if they were separate issues, but are not really entitled to any such distinction, or, if they are separate issues, so equally are the O.U.S. overprint and the Board of Trade perforated crown and B.T. It is said that these official stamps served some purpose in facilitating accountancy arrangements between different departments and the Post Office, but this would hardly entitle them to any special rank. It may be noted that there is one official overprint which was intended only for fiscal uses, namely, the letters "C.A." on one penny stamps of King Edward. (7th). These letters stand for "Crown Agents" and Mr. Charles Nissen informs me

that he has seen copies postally used. Official overprints naturally failed to discourage the stamp thief who found in them a more valuable commodity than if the overprint had been missing. They were discontinued during the reign of King Edward VII.

The last.....their issue.

I have dealt in this brief essay only with the stamps of Great Britain and it may well be that other countries would provide other examples, but, however that may be, I shall be well content if I have done anything to stimulate interest in a somewhat neglected side line of philately. The thief-proofing of stamps is likely to continue so long as human nature exhibits a weakness for pilfering, and to take still other shapes where the form of issue, e.g., coils and booklets, are varied to afford an ever increasing convenience to stamp users."

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Society Comment on this Paper.

Dave Hill points out that this large letter "E" mentioned in the paper had never been identified. Has any member got an Everett cover on which can be found this perfin? Dave also wrote to W.H. Everett and Son Ltd., asking if they had any records of this die, and any other useful information. The reply states:-

"I am sorry to say that we have no pre-war records left at all. My father, who ran Everett before me, said that the Bomb Damage left us with nothing. I am sorry therefore we cannot help. I found your letter and the references to Everett fascinating. If you come across any more we would be most grateful to hear from you as we are trying to piece together a history for our bicentennial next year."

Therefore if anyone has any literature which mentions Everetts and could send a photocopy to Dave, he will be pleased to pass them on to Everetts - who by the way are International Booksellers and Subscription Agents.

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